

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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JOINT AGENCY STREAM CHANNELIZATION GUIDELINES ISSUED

Two Federal agencies, often at odds over the controversial issue of stream channelization, have jointly issued nationwide guidelines that minimize the impact small watershed projects have on fish and wildlife.

Today the approval of the guidelines was announced by Robert L. Herbst, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, and M. Rupert Cutler, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Conservation, Research and Education. The guidelines will affect hundreds of local federally assisted watershed protection and flood prevention projects throughout the Nation.

The guidelines help personnel of the two agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Soil Conservation Service, in identifying when and where channel modification may or may not be used as a technique for implementing water and related land resource projects. Alternatives to channel modification will be carefully considered in consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service during the planning and, where applicable, later phases of small projects. The guidelines emphasize that channel modification will normally emerge as a last resort measure.

A principal consideration guiding the decision to modify any natural channel will be the potential effect on wetlands and streamside vegetation and other important fish and wildlife habitat. Further, the guidelines establish an appeal procedure to resolve disputes between field personnel of the two agencies.

"We see this action as a forward step in resolving the more serious environmental problems associated with the modification of stream channels," Herbst said. "I am pleased that the two agencies--both concerned with consideration of our heritage of natural resources, have moved to address constructively a problem which has divided them in too many instances. I also believe firmly that we should move towards solving such problems and issues through national guidelines rather than through the more tedious route of negotiating each small watershed project which has channelization built into the work plan."

The guidelines were developed by a joint agency committee. The group was formed in June 1976 to study and resolve issues which had arisen between the two agencies. The Fish and Wildlife Service is interested in keeping modification of streams to a minimum because of the potential damage which may result to riverine habitats--essential to many species of fish and wildlife.